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ABSTRACT

Research on predominant methods, content areas, and concepts in geography instruction in the secondary schools from 1910 to the present is reported. Data were collected from the "Journal of Geography" and other professional journals, newspapers, geography teacher training textbooks, social studies teacher training textbooks, yearbooks of the National Council for the Social Studies and the National Council for Geographic Education, and the "How to Do It Series" of methods for teaching the social studies. A chart, labeled by decade, was developed to organize the data. Each time a method, content area, or concept was determined to be important, it was noted on the chart. Results indicated that the emphases in teaching methods have changed from being factually oriented, memorized, nontechnological, and teacher centered to conceptual, individualized, technological, student-centered activities. The content of geography education has evolved from physical geography, emphasizing the analysis of regions of the western world, to a human geography emphasizing relations of regions throughout the world. Finally, geographical concepts have changed from an emphasis on environmental determinism and isolationism to man-land relationships and international goodwill. (Author/KC)

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Plotting the Historical Changes in American Secondary School Geography, 1910-1982

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Plotting the Historical Changes in American

Secondary School Geography, 1910-1982

ABSTRACT

Secondary teacher training literature in geography and social studies was examined for information pertaining to geography methods, content areas, and concepts from 1910 to 1982. The predominant methods, content areas, and concepts for each decade were determined by counting the number of times a method, content area, or concept was credited as being important in the textbooks analyzed. Accordingly, a chart was developed which showed the changes in geography methods, content, and concepts from 1910 to 1982. The findings in the area of methods indicated that geography had changed from a factually oriented, memorized, non-technological, teacher centered, group activity to a conceptual, individualized, technological, child centered activity. In the area of content, study had changed from a physical geography emphasizing the analysis of regions in the Western World to a human geography emphasizing the areal relationships of regions throughout the world. Lastly, in the area of concepts, geography had changed from an emphasis on environmental determinism and isolationism to man-land relationships and international goodwill.

Plotting the Historical Changes in American

Secondary School Geography, 1910-1982

The history of geography education is of interest today because of the need for more research in this area and because of the need to examine how concepts, methods, and content areas in geography evolved and changed in American secondary schools.[1] Accordingly, this study identified geography methods, content areas, and concepts in the literature related to the training of teachers during the past seventy years.

Since 1900, there have been many attempts to make geography a required subject in the secondary schools of the United States. These attempts were concomitant with a liberalization of the geography syllabus, a changing methodology, and an improved teacher training program.

Between 1900 and 1909, physical geography was the predominant course of study in the secondary school curriculum. By the end of the decade, though, the traditional courses in geography were beginning to be absorbed into the general science curriculum.[2] Actually, there appeared little reason to do otherwise. Fewer and fewer students were enrolling in geography courses. There was complaint about the lack of training that the teachers had who taught geography, and lastly, there was little

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[1] W. L. Herman, Jr., "Toward a More Adequate Research Base in Social Studies Education," Journal of Research and Development in Education 13 (1980): 29.

[2] P. Bacon, ed., Focus on Geography (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1970), p. 381.

problem in joining what was taught in geography with what was taught in the other sciences.[3]

As was true prior to World War I, the period between World War I and World War II was beset by problems in generating an interest in the study of geography. The United States had taken an isolationist policy toward other countries. Little or no geography was taught in teacher's colleges, and where geography was taught in the public schools, teaching methods focused on the use of a single textbook, drill, and recitation. It was no wonder that geography became a rather unpopular elective course among students during this time period.[4]

Geography changed most during times of upheaval whether World War I or World War II. The course of war had tremendous effects on the content and popularity of geography. World political geography gained new emphasis. The location, political status, economic importance, climate, culture, and customs of European countries were focal points of study as were cartography, meteorology, and conservation.[5]

During the period immediately following World War II, interest in geography ranged from the offering of geography as an elective in a few schools in some states to requiring geography of all students in

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[3]R. E. Dodge, "Report of the Committee on Geography for Secondary Schools," Journal of Geography 8 (1910): 159-160.

[4]W. C. Bagley and T. Alexander, The Teacher of the Social Studies (San Francisco: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 62; E. Dawson, Teaching the Social Studies (New York: Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 33.

[5]R. C. Miller, "High School Geography in Nebraska," Journal of Geography 47 (1948): 8-9.

in other states. Where geography was offered, favored courses tended toward economic and world geography.[6] Still, there were a number of problems in the acceptance of geography as a regular course in the secondary school curriculum. Geography, in general, was unpopular among students. Schools were plagued by a general lack of preparation among geography teachers.[7] Geography was often not seen as having a unified body of knowledge or a unique content, and lastly, administrators continued to favor the incorporation of geography into the science curriculum.[8] These trends continued into the early 1960s.

Geography during the mid and late 1960s and 1970s developed into an independent subject of more importance. Its historical role as a separate course of study in secondary curriculums was rejuvenated. Professional activities and the attitudes of educators began to support geography as a separate field of study. The National Council for the Social Studies issued several yearbooks pertaining to the development of geography as a separate course of study. People became more aware of the importance of knowing about other people and places, and with the hegemony of human geography over physical phenomena, more people had a reason to become interested in geography as geography became a study of their own lives.[9]

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[6]N. C. Brooks, "The Values of Geography as a High School Subject," Dissertation Abstracts 17 (1957): 267.

[7]Miller, p. 17.

[8]C. F. Cole and D. Pontius, "What About Geography?" California Journal of Secondary Education 23 (1948): 416.

[9]L. S. Kenworthy, Guide to Social Studies Teaching, 2nd ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1966), p. 283; L. S. Kenworthy, Guide to Social Studies Teaching, 4th ed. (Belmont California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1973).

METHODS OF THE STUDY

Sources of the Data

1. Journal of Geography and other professional journals.
2. Times Education Supplement and other newspapers.
3. Geography teacher training textbooks.
4. Social Studies teacher training textbooks.
5. The yearbooks of the National Council for the Social Studies.
6. The yearbooks of the National Council for Geographic Education.
7. How to Do Series of methods for teaching the social studies.

Data Collected

A chart was developed seven feet wide and three feet long in order to organize the data. It was divided into seven equal parts widthwise. Each part was labeled by decade as from 1910-1919, 1920-1929, 1930-1939, etc. Each decade was subdivided into as many parts as there were publishers of literature related to teacher training in geography. The chart was also divided lengthwise into three parts. Each part had a different label; one each for methods, content, and concepts. For the sections on methods, content, and concepts there followed for each decade a listing by publisher of the methods, content, and concepts described in selected geography literature related to teacher training. In order to follow the changing trends in methods, content, and concepts, a code was assigned to individual items in the listings. For example, if an item was a new method in the teaching of geography from 1910-1919, then it was coded "n10" which stood for "new in 1910." Next, it was important to find out how long the item remained an important method.

Consequently, each decade was traced backwards from the 1970s/80s until finding the item. The last decade was noted with an "L" and the year. The entire code, then, for the item would read: "n10L60." This notation shows that the item had not been mentioned in any decade from 1920 to 1960. However, had it been mentioned, it would have been given a different code such as "n1020304050L60." The coding procedure described above was used for each item in each decade from 1910 through the 1970s/80s in the three categories of method, content, and concepts. There were 218 items coded in the area of teaching methods, 119 in the area of content, and 37 in the area of concepts.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The decade of the 1910s began with a focus on repetition and memorization.[10] However, as the decade progressed, there was an undercurrent of movement toward more experience and experimentation in geography especially as geography became more and more a part of the other offered science courses.[11] More field work could be found and where direct experience was less accessible, laboratory work provided an adequate substitute.[12] Learning was inductive and relationships were seen in terms of cause and effect.[13] The teacher's motto was learn by

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[10]J. W. Redway, The New Basis of Geography, ed. N. M. Butler (New York: Macmillan Company, 1914), p. 125.

[11]Redway, p. 179.

[12]P. Monroe, ed., A Cyclopedia of Education (New York: Macmillan Company, 1912), p. 33.

[13]Redway, p. 131.

doing. Accordingly, students could be found making their own map projections or involved in any number of other activities in order to gain skills in using the geographer's tools.[14] In addition, students also participated in lessons having many similarities to lessons using the discovery method. For example, students would study the physical and cultural aspects of a number of countries for later comparisons between countries.[15] The home region would be studied first with future study of the United States and western Europe.[16] As such, geography was a study of regions. Physical geography was most important with a focus on landforms, climate, flora, fauna, and ecological interrelationships. Cultural geography became more important as the decade progressed, but still, the study of the relationship between the person and the land tended toward being a study of how the person had to adapt him/herself to the physical environment.[17]

In the 1920s, commercial/industrial geography gained added importance and because places were studied in terms of the past as well as in terms of the present, a historical perspective was added to the study of geography.[18] Field work for the observation of local

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[14]L. T. Johnson, "Changing Objectives in Geography," in Classroom and Administrative Problems in the Teaching of the Social Sciences, The Second Yearbook of the National Council for the Social Studies (Philadelphia: McKinley Publishing Company, 1932), p. 178.

[15]Redway, p. 183.

[16]Redway, p. 124; Dodge, p. 161.

[17]L. T. Johnson, p. 178.

[18]H. W. Fairbanks, Real Geography and Its Place in the Schools (San Francisco: Harr Wagner Publishing Company, 1927), p. 120; Association of Collegiate Schools of Business, Social Studies in Secondary Schools (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), p. 31; Dawson, p. 28.

phenomena was the starting point for additional study by way of the comparative approach, problems approach, and topical studies. In the comparative approach, the identification of things and conditions in the home region was compared with the identification of things and conditions in a selected few other parts of the world. Comparison, though, was not in terms of a nationalistic bias in favor of one's own country for it was emphasized that students were citizens of the world.[19] The problems approach focused on the posing of certain questions such as why cities grew near bay areas. Type or topic studies were very much related to the problems approach. A class might study the relationship of a particular river to an area being served by it. A thorough study of this one example would eliminate the need to study other similar river systems.[20] In the study of the relationship between the person and the environment, the environment remained the significant and determining factor, though more and more attention was being given to the environmental modifications made by human beings.[21]

In the 1930s, Earth was studied as the home of man.[22] As such, environmental determinism was emphasized in terms of human responses

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[19]Fairbanks, pp. 92, 56.

[20]Fairbanks, pp. 84, 107.

[21]Dawson, p. 28.

[22]D. Stull, "Geography in the Social Studies Program," in Elements of the Social Studies Program, The Sixth Yearbook of the National Council for the Social Studies (Philadelphia: McKinley Publishing Company, 1936), p. 68.

to environmental controls.[23] The area for analysis switched somewhat from a study of natural regions to a study of political regions.[24] When using the inductive problems approach to study a country, attention was on the felt problems of the people of that country.[25] Cause and effect relationships were examined for a clearer understanding of the problem. In going from the study of the problems of the people near one's home to the study of the problems of people in other countries, there were historical overtones but greater emphasis tended to put on the current situation.[26] Common textbooks were used along with audio-visual supplements.[27]

In the 1940s and 1950s, there were individuals who still regarded the memorization of facts as an important part in the study of geography.[28] However, there was also a strong movement toward making geography a conceptual study. Students would interpret geographical phenomena, investigate cause and effect relationships, and utilize the steps in the

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[23] C. F. Kohn, ed., Geographic Approaches to Social Education (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1948), pp. 16-19; E. H. Reeder, Geography: For Public School Administrators (New York: Teachers College, Bureau of Publications, Columbia University, 1931), pp. 4-6.

[24] L. G. Kennamer, Jr., "The Unique Change in School Geography," Journal of Geography 54 (1955): 31.

[25] Reeder, p. 66.

[26] Stull, pp. 73, 81; Kennamer, p. 31.

[27] Reeder, pp. 67-70.

[28] O. Garnett, Fundamentals in School Geography (Toronto: George G. Harrap and Company, 1949), p. 142.

scientific method toward developing their skills in problem solving.[29] With these objectives in mind, a discovery/inquiry approach to learning was implemented through topical studies. Topics were often more limited in nature than the study of natural regions, though natural, political, and cultural regional studies still remained important.[30] The discovery process started in the home community and involved field work and observations of local phenomena.[31] It often involved a historical survey of the changes in areal patterns over time and space.[32] Having studied their own home, students could compare their own lives to the lives of other children in other parts of the world.[33] The selection of other parts of the world for comparison was based on the significance of these regions in terms of their cultural similarities and differences with one's own home region.[34] The goals were to better human relationships, broaden the good neighbor policy, and to show how the purposes of life and work all over the world were essentially the same.[35] One other objective included an examination of one's use of and adjustment to the environment.[36]

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[29]Kohn, p. 219; R. A. Price, ed., New Viewpoints in the Social Sciences (Wisconsin: George Banta Company, 1958), p. 40; P. E. James, ed., New Viewpoints in Geography (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1959), p. 12.

[30]Garnett, p. 42; Bacon, p. 381.

[31]Kohn, p. 102; G. H. Gopsill, The Teaching of Geography (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1956), p. 24.

[32]Kohn, p. 175; James, p. 12.

[33]Kohn, pp. 16-19.

[34]Reeder, pp. 4-6.

[35]Kohn, pp. 217, 221.

[36]Garnett, p. 142, 192.

In order to help facilitate geographic understanding, travel, pictorial essays, literature, and role playing were among the recommended methods for adding variety to the classroom setting.

Learning by doing was the hallmark of geography education during the 1960s and 1970/80s. This inquiry method had students concentrating on answers to questions of what, why, and how.[37] Needed skills included observing, logical reasoning, hypothesizing, data collecting, testing, defining, comparing, generalizing, and decision-making.[38] Study was organized in a hierarchy of learning difficulty from elementary skills and content to deeper experiences.[39] Accordingly, field work in the home area entailed observation, interpretation, and description of the physical and cultural landscape with attention given to spatial arrangements and distributions as processes still in development.[40] Multidisciplinary case studies were often made of a few selected topical areas using current events, historical references, biographical data, interviews, and questionnaires.[41] Map work focused on the gathering of data

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[37]P. R. Hanna et al., Geography in the Teaching of Social Studies (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), pp. 68-69; R. D. Swartz et al., eds., Metropolitan America: Geographic Perspectives and Teaching Strategies (Illinois: National Council for Geographic Education, 1972), pp. 369-411.

[38]C. Crabtree, "Inquiry Approaches to Learning Concepts and Generalizations in Social Studies," Social Education 30 (1966): 407; Bacon, p. 306; Kenworthy, 4th edition.

[39]Hanna, pp. 68-69.

[40]Bacon, p. 128; F. J. Estvan, Social Studies in a Changing World (San Francisco: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), p. 29.

[41]Bacon, pp. 68, 389-390; Hanna, p. 383.

from first hand experiences, plotting data on maps, and interpreting distribution and location.[42] Other common aids to learning included the use of media, simulations, programmed instruction, and peer tutoring.[43] Having studied thoroughly the home areas, comparative studies were expanded to include other parts of the world. This attention, though, was not limited to studies just of the western world as had been the case so often in the past.[44] World community awareness was certainly an objective of great importance.[45] Other objectives, though, included an understanding of how people made use of their environment and how people could control and shape that environment to meet their needs.[46]

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[42]Hanna et al., pp. 375-379.

[43]Kenworthy, 4th edition.

[44]R. L. Ebel, ed., Encyclopedia of Educational Research (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 1232.

[45]Hanna et al., pp. 85-90.

[46]L. S. Kenworthy, Background Papers for Social Studies Teachers (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1966), p. 67; Bacon, pp. 5, 384.